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## JEWISH FAMILY LIFE.

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*Marriage.—The house.—Furniture.—Monogamy and divorce.—Superiority of Jewish to heathen morals.—The coming of the child.—The instruction of children.—Household duties.—Hospitality.—Feasts.*

Family life begins with marriage, but marriage is usually preceded by betrothal, and betrothal was at least among the Jews of the later time a matter of as much seriousness and solemnity as marriage itself. In earlier days it was apparently accomplished merely by oral promises confirmed perhaps by gifts (Gen. 24:50, 51; 29:19); there is no mention in the Old Testament of a written contract of betrothal. But in later times betrothal became a formal ceremony. According to the Mishna, and quite likely as early as the first century, it took place in the presence of witnesses; the young man gave to his prospective bride some token or written promise that he would marry her, and a legal document fixing the terms of the marriage, dowry, etc., was drawn up. The man and woman were then as sacredly bound to each other as if married. Even the property of the bride belonged from that time to the husband. They could be separated only by death or divorce. It is in entire conformity with this conception of the nature of betrothal that the evangelist speaking of Joseph's intention to dissolve the bond between himself and his betrothed wife uses the word regularly employed for divorcing a wife (Matt. 1:19).

Marriage itself took place, according to the Mishna, a year after betrothal, or in the case of a widow a month after. But it can hardly be assumed that this was at any time a rule uniformly observed. A festal procession led the bride from her father's house to that of her husband (1 Macc. 9:37), her own future home. Yet sometimes, it would seem from Matt. 25:1, 10, the

bridegroom came to the bride's house and the festivities were held there. The marriage of Tobias also took place at the house of the bride's father (*Tob.* chaps. 7, 8).

The wedding procession was wont to take place at night (*Matt.* 25:1-6). The entrance of the bride into the house of her husband, or the moment when bride and groom met, was regarded as the moment of special interest. In the house a formal legal instrument was drawn up or signed. Mention of such a contract is made in *Tob.* 7:14, though in this instance betrothal and marriage are scarcely distinguishable. Then followed the marriage feast. All in all a wedding was an occasion of the greatest rejoicing and festivity, celebrated with music and feasting (*Gen.* 31:27; *1 Macc.* 19:39; *John* 2:3 ff.; cf. *Luke* 15:25). In his answer to the question of the Pharisees about fasting, Jesus refers to the incongruity of anything suggestive of sorrow at a marriage. The festivities sometimes continued for days (*Judges* 14:12; *Tob.* 8:19). There was no definitely appointed religious service in connection with a wedding, the nearest approach to it being the blessing pronounced by the father of one or of each of the young people (*Tob.* 7:13).

The house to which the groom took his bride would depend of course on his station in life and the means at his command. The simplest form of house consisted of a single square room. The walls would be built of clay or of sun-dried brick; stone was used only in the neighborhood of mountains or for the more expensive city houses. The roof would be of straw and mud, or mortar, ashes, etc., laid upon timbers or boughs, and rolled flat and hard. Surrounded by a parapet (*Deut.* 22:8), it could be used for hanging linen or drying fruits, or as a place of retirement. It was on the housetop that Peter sought quiet for prayer (*Acts* 10:9). Such a house would have but one door, and the windows would be latticed, not glazed, and small so as to exclude the summer heat as far as possible. Inside, if the husband included in his possession a few sheep or goats, there would be two parts of the room on different levels. The lower part would be used for the animals at night, and the upper part—not an upper story, but merely one side of the room with a higher floor

than the other—for the family. If there were no animals, as would often be the case in the towns, or there were so many that separate provision was made for them in sheepfolds outside, the whole room would be given up to the family. But in this one room they would all live by night and by day. Separate bedchambers (2 Sam. 4:7) were to be found only in the houses of the well-to-do. The first step from this simplest possible form of a house would be taken when there was erected upon the flat roof a booth of boughs for use in summer; and the next when by means of a more or less substantial and permanent roof placed over the whole of the main flat roof of the house, or by the erection of a walled chamber over a portion of the roof (2 Kings 4:2), a permanent upper room was obtained.



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Such probably were the upper rooms mentioned in Acts 1:13 and 9:37, 39. The house of Simon the Tanner apparently did not have this addition (Acts 10:9). When such a room existed it often had two exits, one through the house, the other by a flight of stairs leading directly to the street. Hence one fleeing in haste need not go down into the house (Matt. 24:17).

Of course there were houses of the wealthy and of royal personages that differed greatly from these simpler houses of the common people. Limestone was to be had in Palestine, and from it those who had the means built palaces of stone. These were constructed around a court or even had a series of courts, and might be built two or even three stories in height. For these houses foreign woods were imported, though probably used almost exclusively for interior finish (1 Kings, chaps. 6, 7). But the common people dwelt in simple and detached houses. In Rome there were in ancient times, as in modern, great tenement houses many stories in height. But these were probably not to be seen in Palestine at all.

The furniture in the house of a peasant or artisan Jew was of the simplest kind. The table might be high or low according to the posture which the family were wont to take at meals. In ancient times it was the custom to sit at table, either on the floor in oriental fashion, or on a seat or chair (Gen. 27:19; 1 Sam. 20:24, 25; 2 Kings 4:10). Reclining at meals was evidently at first associated with the luxurious living brought in from foreign countries (Am. 6:4; Sir. 41:19). But in the New Testament time it was, if not the invariable custom, at least a very common habit. The words used for the position in eating are all such as denote a reclining posture (Matt. 9:10; Mark 6:22; Luke 7:36; 9:14, etc.). In addition to the table and the chairs or the couches (Mark 7:4, R. V. marg.), there would be the lamp stand, the broom, the mill for grinding grain, the bushel, and the ordinary implements of cooking. The poorer houses probably had nothing that we should call a bedstead. The very poor simply wrapped themselves in their cloaks, and lay on the clay floor, or on a mat woven of palm leaves. In some cases there was a seat or ledge around the room or at one

side, on which at night mattresses or rugs were laid. Even in the elegant houses of Pompeii there is along one side of the tiny sleeping rooms a ledge of masonry which evidently served as a bedstead or the basis of one. We read, indeed, in the Old Testament of couches of ivory (Am. 6:4), probably a species of couch or divan supported by ivory legs, and intended primarily for use at meals. On such a couch there would be spread rugs of various colors and textures (Prov. 7:16; Ezek. 13:18, 20; Am. 3:12). In this matter there was opportunity for luxury and elegance according to the means of the individual. But all these things are expressly mentioned with disapproval as articles of elegance. It is probable that none of them were to be found in ordinary homes and that even in the houses of the wealthy the furnishings were, except perhaps in the matter of drapings and rugs, such as would seem to our modern taste simple and even plain. The rooms were warmed, if at all, only, as is still common in southern climates, with a charcoal fire in a brazier set in the midst of the room (Jer. 36:22 f.; John 18:18; R. V. marg.). Pictures and statuary, as forbidden by the law (Ex. 20:4), would not be seen in the house of a loyal Jew at all. Books, though by no means forbidden, were rare, and confined, except perhaps in the case of the more cultivated Jews of the later time who had come under Greek influence, almost wholly to copies of a portion of the Scriptures. The reference in 1 Macc. 1:56, 57 to the attempt of Antiochus Epiphanes to destroy all copies of the Jewish Scriptures, "wheresoever was found with any a book of the covenant," indicates that even in that time copies of portions of the Scriptures were to be found in private hands. Yet how common this was is difficult to say. Whether there was in the Nazareth home of Jesus a copy of the Old Testament, or whether he had access only to the synagogue copy, we cannot say with certainty. Certain it is that he was a diligent reader and profound student of the Old Testament.

The position of the wife in a Jewish home was on the whole a high and honorable one. Monogamy was probably always the general rule among the Israelites. The patriarchs, indeed, and some of the kings had more than one wife; some of the latter

had many. But though the law assumed the possibility of polygamy, both the law and the prophetic teaching tended to check it and to mitigate its evils. (See Ex. 21:8; Deut. 21:15 ff., 17:17; Mal. 2:14). The capital passage in Gen. 2:24 is essentially monogamous in spirit, and is made still more so in the form it assumes in the Septuagint, "they *two* shall become one flesh," which is also the form in which Jesus quotes it. And though neither in the New Testament period nor for a long time after did polygamy wholly cease among the Jews (see Jos., *Ant.* 17:1; 2, 3; cf. Ginsburg, art. on Marriage in Kitto's *Cyclop.*; Schürer, *Jewish People*, I, I, 455), it does not seem to have been common. Neither Jesus nor Paul found occasion to deal directly with it. In a Jewish home of the first century there was usually but one wife, who, though her marriage may have been arranged more by her father's judgment than by her own preference, was yet the object of her husband's undivided love. In one respect, indeed, her position was far from ideal. The law gave to the husband the right of putting away his wife if he found "some unseemly thing" in her. The interpretation of this vague phrase was, as is well known, a living question in the first century. The famous Rabbi Hillel had adopted the laxer view, which permitted the husband to divorce his wife for any reason that seemed to him sufficient, even for such trifling matters as "preparing a dish badly, making a blunder, or burning the meat." Shammai, on the other hand, maintained that the phrase "some unseemly thing" must be interpreted in practice as referring exclusively to adultery. The gospels record (Mark 10:3; Matt. 19:3) that the Pharisees put to Jesus this question on which their great scribes had disagreed, and that he unequivocally took the position already favored by Shammai. How generally the people had taken advantage of Hillel's lax view and how much hardship had been suffered by Jewish women because of it we have no definite means of knowing; but even in the days of Malachi the prophet forcibly denounced the husbands who divorced their wives (Mal. 2:14-16) and the language of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:31 f.) suggests that easy divorce was one of the evils of his time also. The Mishna makes provision for

the wife's obtaining divorce from her husband (*Yebamoth* 65, a, b; *Kettubboth* 77, a), and Paul also treats the question of the separation of husband and wife reciprocally (1 Cor. 7:10 ff.); but the language of Jesus in the gospels (if we except Mark 10:12) con-



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tains no reference to the possibility of a wife's putting away her husband. Perhaps the question of a wife's right to put away her husband had in Jesus' day not been much agitated among the Jews.

But whatever evils may have existed in Jewish society by reason of a tendency to easy dissolution of the marriage tie, Jewish homes were in this respect still vastly better protected than the Greek and Roman homes of the time. In Athens divorce could be had by mutual consent, or, subject to restrictions, on the application of either party. Though divorce is said to have been unknown among the early Romans, a very different state of affairs prevailed in the latter days of the Republic and the early days of the Empire. Marriage customs, and with them divorce usages, had gradually but greatly changed. A marriage

might be dissolved by mutual consent, or either party might repudiate the other without the consent of that other. As the *affectio maritalis* was conceived to be necessary to constitute a marriage, so its continuance was regarded as necessary to the maintenance of the marriage. Cato the younger divorced his wife Marcia, that his friend Hortensius might marry her and she bear him children. Cicero divorced the wife with whom he had lived thirty years, and married a young woman whom he in turn put away. Of course solitary instances prove nothing, but, making due allowance for exceptional cases and the exaggerations of satirists, it is only too evident that in the cultivated heathenism of the first century the foundations of family morality were sadly undermined. Jewish family life presented a marked and favorable contrast to that which was to be seen in Athens or Corinth or Rome.

But if in the matter of divorce Judaism appears at an advantage as compared with the heathenism around it, this is still more true in respect to those personal vices which are the most deadly enemies of pure family life. Law and prophet alike had always denounced adultery and prostitution in sternest language, and though both vices had always existed and called for denunciation (and what nation can here plead innocence?), yet the Jews had never sunk into those awful depths of vileness to which the cultivated heathenism of the first century had descended. Lust had never been sanctified by religion and enshrined in the place of worship, as at Corinth; moralists had never been reduced to the extremity of praising the young man who betook himself to the harlot because he would thus be saved from worse iniquity, as at Rome. Paul indeed laid it to the charge of the Jews who condemned the wickedness of the Gentiles and boasted of their own goodness that they did the same things that they condemned, and in particular accused them of adultery (Rom. 2:1, 22); yet it is noticeable that his detailed accusation against them contains no mention of those awful and unnatural vices which he charges against the Gentiles, and which we know from other sources to have been terribly common; and we must understand his charge as meaning not

that the Jews went to the same extent of iniquity as the Gentiles, but that they were guilty of the same generic sins.

The love of children was always strong in the heart of the Jew, alike of father and mother. Law and narrative and poetry of the Old Testament all bear witness to this fact (*Lev. 26:9*; *1 Sam. 1*; *Ps. 127:3*; *128*, etc.). Destruction of children unborn or exposure of them after birth, both too terribly common among the Gentiles, were almost or wholly unknown among the Jews. Only in *Ezek. 16:5* is there reference to the latter custom, and then only in a figurative sense. As among ancient oriental nations in general, a boy was more highly esteemed (*1 Sam. 1:11*; *Jer. 20:15*) than a girl; yet daughters were depreciated only relatively. In the great majority of cases sons and daughters are spoken of together in the Bible without intimation of discrimination. In ancient times the boy was named at his birth, and sometimes, at least, by his mother (*Gen. 29:32* and *chap. 30*), but in later times on the occasion of his circumcision (*Luke 1:59*; *2:21*). The ceremonies connected with the redemption of the first-born son and with the purification of the mother are familiar to every reader of the New Testament from their mention in connection with the birth of Jesus. Attention has often been called to the fact that the offering made on this occasion (*Luke 2:24*) was that which the law permits to her whose "means suffice not for a lamb" (*Lev. 12:8*) and to the incidental proof thus given that the mother of Jesus belonged among the poor of the land.

The law enjoined upon the parents the duty of instructing their children both in the history and in the religion of their nation—two things which were to the Jew almost inseparable (*Deut. 4:9*; *6:7, 20*; *11:19*). To the injunction of *Deut. 6:6-9*,<sup>1</sup> and the similar words in *Ex. 13:9, 16* and *11:18*, he gave a very literal interpretation. In obedience to the law as he

<sup>1</sup> And these words which I command thee this day shall be upon thy heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thy house, and upon thy gates.

understood it, he wrote the two passages Deut. 6:4–9 and 11:13–21 on parchment and enclosing it in an oblong box fixed the box to house and room doors above the right-hand doorpost; the four passages, Ex. 13:2–10, 11–17; Deut. 6:4–9; 11:13–21, written on strips of parchment, and enclosed in little leather boxes, he bound as phylacteries on his arm and as frontlets between his eyes when he engaged in prayer. The obligation to wear these Tephillin rested only on the male members of the family, and on them from the thirteenth year. But though the Jews thus externalized the latter part of the command, there is no reason to doubt that they obeyed the other portion concerning the teaching of their children with equal punctiliousness. It was probably not an idle boast, though of course there was something of oriental hyperbole in it, when Josephus claimed that his people were so well acquainted with the law that if one should ask any of them concerning its statutes he could tell them more readily than his own name, because having begun to learn them from earliest infancy they were as it were engraved on their hearts. Reciprocal to the duty of the parent to teach his children was the duty of the child to obey and honor his parents, father and mother alike (Ex. 20:12, Prov. 1:8; 6:20 ff. Sir. 3:3 ff.), a duty flagrantly evaded, so far as we know, only in the case of grown-up children who under shelter of a vow escaped the burden of supporting their parents (Mark 7:11, 12; cf. Schürer, II, II, 123; cf. also Sir. 3:12 ff.).

In general it must be said that the law and its requirements filled so large a place in the thought and life of the Jew that it is hardly an exaggeration when Jost says that "the entire life of Judaism was religion."

Yet thoroughly as a Jewish life was impregnated with the thought of religion, and heavy as was the burden which the law and the casuistry of the scribes had laid on the shoulders of the people (Acts 15:10; Matt. 23:4), yet a Jewish home had its round of everyday occupations such as are necessary everywhere among civilized peoples to make life comfortable or even possible. Children were cared for usually by their own mothers. Nurses are mentioned only in connection with the more wealthy

families (2 Sam. 4:4; 2 Kings 11:2). The preparation of the food seems also to have been done by, or under the immediate direction of, the women of the house, even in families that were well-to-do. In patriarchal times Abraham calls on Sarah to pro-



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vide cakes for his unexpected guests (Gen. 18:6). In later Old Testament times the ideal wife rose early in the morning and gave meat to her household (Prov. 31:15). And in the New Testament time Martha, evidently by no means of the poorest class, "served" when Jesus was a guest at her house (Luke 10:40; John 12:2). Even Hillel's inclusion of a burned dinner in the justifiable causes for divorce testifies that the wife was the cook of the family. The weaving of linen and of wool fell also to the lot of the women of the house, as well as the preparation

and care of the clothing for the household. This, however, was a somewhat simpler matter than it would be in modern times and in occidental lands.

In the houses of the wealthy there were of course slaves or hired servants (Luke 15:17) to perform all these tasks or to assist in them. But slaves at least were far less numerous than among the Romans, and their condition far superior in every way. Manual labor was never despised by a true Hebrew. The rabbis taught that he who failed to teach his son a trade in effect taught him to steal. Even the boy who was destined to be a scribe first learned a trade, as did Paul. It was no reproach to Jesus that he was a carpenter (Mark 6:3).

The entertainment of guests was among the Jews at once one of the pleasures of life and a sacred duty. The Old Testament abounds in references to acts of hospitality, and the New Testament gives instances both of guests invited to a meal (Mark 2:15; Luke 11:37; 14:1; John 12:2) and of friends or strangers entertained over night. Christ's illustration of the man who found himself with nothing to set before his friend who had come to him on his journey (Luke 11:5, 6) indicates that it was not the great or the wealthy only that were wont to show hospitality. Khans there were, to be sure, where a traveler might find shelter for himself and his beasts, but probably in most cases had to provide not only his own bedding but food for himself and provender for his animals. In such a khan it was that Joseph and Mary lodged and Jesus was born (Luke 2:7). Sometimes there was a keeper of the inn, from whom necessary food, etc., might be purchased (Luke 10:36). But these did not, by any means, displace the exercise of private hospitality. The instructions given by Jesus to his disciples when he sent them out to preach (Mark 6:7, 8; Luke 10:4-8) show that a traveler going from town to town might expect entertainment not only among his personal friends, but among comparative strangers, and that, too, without pay. In 1838 Edward Robinson traveled through certain regions where the ancient customs still prevailed, and was received everywhere as a guest without expense; an offer of pay was regarded as insulting (*Bib. Res.*, II, 19).

Among the elements of Jewish family life the feasts require at least brief mention. Though the three great feasts were observed at Jerusalem and the obligation to attend them was laid only on the male members of the family (Deut. 16:16), yet the women often went voluntarily, as did Mary the mother of Jesus (Luke 2:41), and the passover meal itself was observed as a family feast. Then the father explained to his children the origin and significance of the feast in accordance with the command of Ex. 12:26, 27. Even those who remained at home were reminded of the feast by the seven days' exclusion of leaven from the house (Ex. 12:19, 20). Among the influences that were at the same time intellectually educative, and quickening to patriotism and religion, and which tended to connect family life with both, the feasts were of the highest importance.

It was into a Jewish home of the humbler sort that Jesus was born. There was none of the elegance or the enervation that come with wealth. Industry must have excluded bitter poverty, which was in any case rare among the Jews, but Joseph, the village carpenter, probably never gave to his family of sons and daughters (Mark 6:3) more than the ordinary comforts of life. The glimpses we are afforded of the life in that home, elevated by love and permeated with religion, lead us to think of it as a noble example of the noblest type of family life the ancient world knew. Further than this only a reverent imagination guided by knowledge of him who came forth from that home to be the world's Teacher and the world's Saviour can carry us.